



HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

A Pioneer in Optimism: The Legacy of Donald Munro, MD

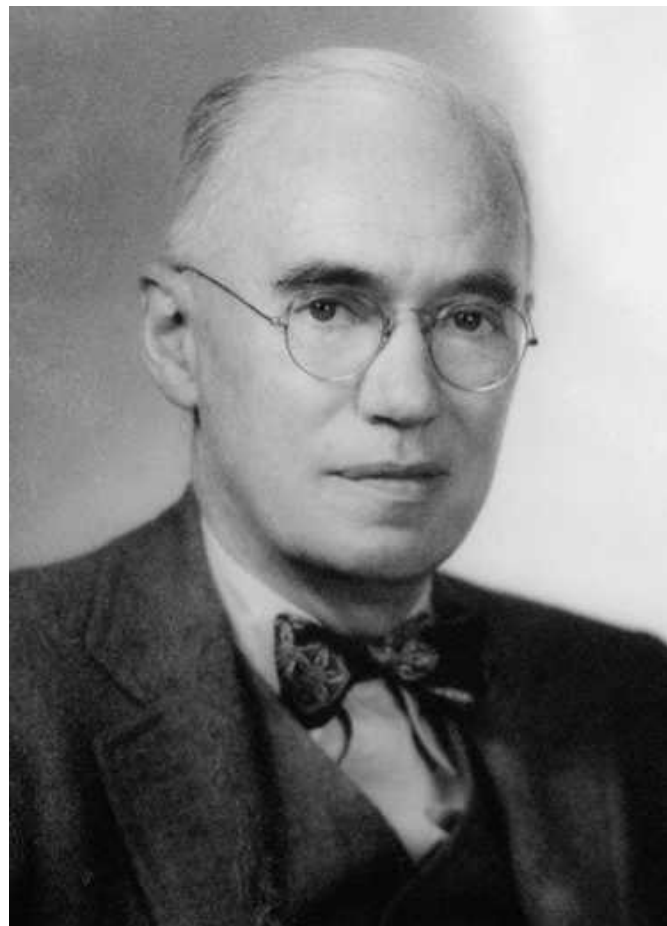
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Editor

Since 1983, American Paraplegia Society has invited noted experts in spinal cord medicine and research to present the Donald Munro Memorial Lecture (1). These invited lecturers enrich our knowledge while honoring the pioneer in spinal cord medicine known as the 'father of paraplegia' (2-5).

Munro was born in Boston in 1889 to a prominent family. His father was a well known surgeon and his mother was the daughter of Dr. E.R. Squibb, founder of the pharmaceutical company. Of Scottish descent, Munro claimed an ancestor who was captured by Cromwell at the Battle of Worcester in 1652 and deported to America. In 1695, the Munroes established a tavern in Lexington, Massachusetts, which remains standing as historical landmark of the American Revolution. Munroe Tavern was used by Lord Hugh Percy as the British headquarters and infirmary during the Battle of Lexington in 1775 (6,7).

A graduate of Harvard College and Harvard Medical School, Munro studied medicine and surgery in Boston, Chicago and Philadelphia, and served as a surgeon in the Army Medical Corps in France during World War I. After the war, he joined the surgical staff of Boston City Hospital where he specialized in neurosurgery in a career that would span 36 years at the hospital. When the neurosurgery service began caring for individuals with spinal cord injuries (SCI), which at the time carried a mortality rate of 80%, Munro developed a special interest in their comprehensive care. His 10-bed unit, established in 1936, showed that with thoughtful and attentive care, patients lived longer and better lives (2,3).

Munro achieved noteworthy outcomes by incorporating physical rehabilitation including bowel and bladder management and physical and occupational therapy, and by addressing patients' complex socioeconomic needs (2,3,8). His small unit became the model for SCI care in the United States. Munro's work influenced the Veterans Administration to establish SCI Centers around the US to care for wounded soldiers. His practices formed



Donald Munro, MD, 1889–1973.

the basis for multidisciplinary, holistic care for people with SCI and inspired other dedicated pioneers such as Ernest Bors, Estin Comarr, John Young and Erich Krueger (9-11). His many published articles and books broke new ground in every aspect of the management of people living with the consequences of SCI (5).

It has been said that Munro is "best remembered as a pioneer in optimism" for people with a condition long considered hopeless (11). Over the past 16 years, the Donald Munro Memorial Lectureship has traced the advancements in our field from basic care of SCI complications to research applications involving neuroscience and the latest technologies—evidence that Munro's legacy of optimism continues to offer hope to

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individuals with SCI and inspire professionals in spinal cord medicine.

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Invited Munro Lecturers 1983-2009

- 1983 A. Estin Comarr, MD: "A Tribute to Donald Munro"
1984 Erich G. Krueger, MD: "Birth of Spinal Neurotraumatology in America"
1985 Msgr. Charles Fahey: "Ethical Issues Involved With Care of the Elderly and Disabled"
1986 Juan Fonseca, MD: "The Veterans Administration and Spinal Cord Injury: A Record of Service"
1987 Thomas E. Harvey: "The Lives of the Spinal Cord Injured"
1988 Robert Slater, MD: "Ethical Issues of Disability"
1989 No Lecture (APS/ASIA Joint Conference Day)
1990 Sir Philip Harris: "Spinal Cord Injury in the 20th Century"
1991 James J. Weisman, Esq.: "The Americans with Disabilities Act"
1992 Donald L. Custis, MD: "Future Health Care: Strategy 2000"
1993 Samuel L. Stover, MD: "Spinal Cord Injury Knowns and Unknowns"
1994 Kenneth M. Viste, Jr., MD: "Changes in Delivery of Medical Care: Impact on Long-Term Disabilities"
1995 John F. Ditunno, MD: "Functional Outcomes in Spinal Cord Injury: Quality Care vs Cost Containment"
1996 Gale G. Whiteneck, PhD: "Evaluating Outcomes After Spinal Cord Injury: What Determines Success"
1997 Robert Waters, MD: "Functional and Neurological Recovery After Acute SCI"
1998 Byron A. Kakulas, MD: "The Neuropathology of Human Spinal Cord Injury With Neurological Correlation"
1999 Joel A. DeLisa, MD, MS: "Subspecialty Certification in Spinal Cord Medicine"
2000 Edward D. Hall, PhD: "Pharmacological Treatment of Acute SCI: How Do We Build on Past Success?"
2001 John D. Banja, PhD: "When the Payer Says 'No': Considerations in Patient Advocacy"
2002 N. D. Vaziri, MD: "Role of Nitric Oxide in Microgravity-Induced Orthostatic Intolerance—Relevance to SCI"
2003 Inder Perakash, MD: "Neurogenic Bladder: Past, Present and Future"
2004 Steven G. Waxman, MD, PhD: "Turning the Impossible to the Possible"
2005 Hans Frankel, MD: "Fifty Years Progress in the Management of Spinal Cord Injury"
2006 William Donovan, MD: Spinal Cord Injury: Past, Present and Future"
2007 Mary Bunge, PhD: "Novel Combination Strategies to Repair the Injured Mammalian Spinal Cord"
2008 Kenneth Parsons, MD: "Evidence-based Medicine and Quality of Care for Persons with SCI"
2009 Hunter Peckham, PhD: "Neuroprostheses for Movement Restoration"